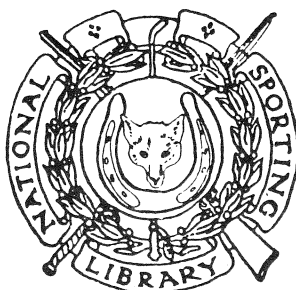


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NEWS



LETTER

A Research Center for Turf and Field Sports,
their History and Social Significance

Middleburg, Virginia 22117

December 1985

Judith Ozment, Librarian

No. 21

Stull's 1884 portrait of George Lorillard's *Duke of Magenta*. A bay horse, foaled 1875, by Lexington out of Magenta, he was the best horse of 1878, winning 11 out of 12 starts including the Preakness, Belmont, Withers, Travers, Kenner and Dixie.



"Glow of Silver" **Reflections on the Life of Henry Stull 1851-1913**

Frederick Burlew

Walter S. Vosburgh, noted turf historian, was not prone to the superlative in his evaluation of a great horse of an era. He often stated, "You cannot compare great horses of one period with those of another." He never revealed, during a fifty year career, who he believed was the greatest he ever saw.

Yet he was not reserved in his appraisal of Henry Stull. In the artist's obitu-

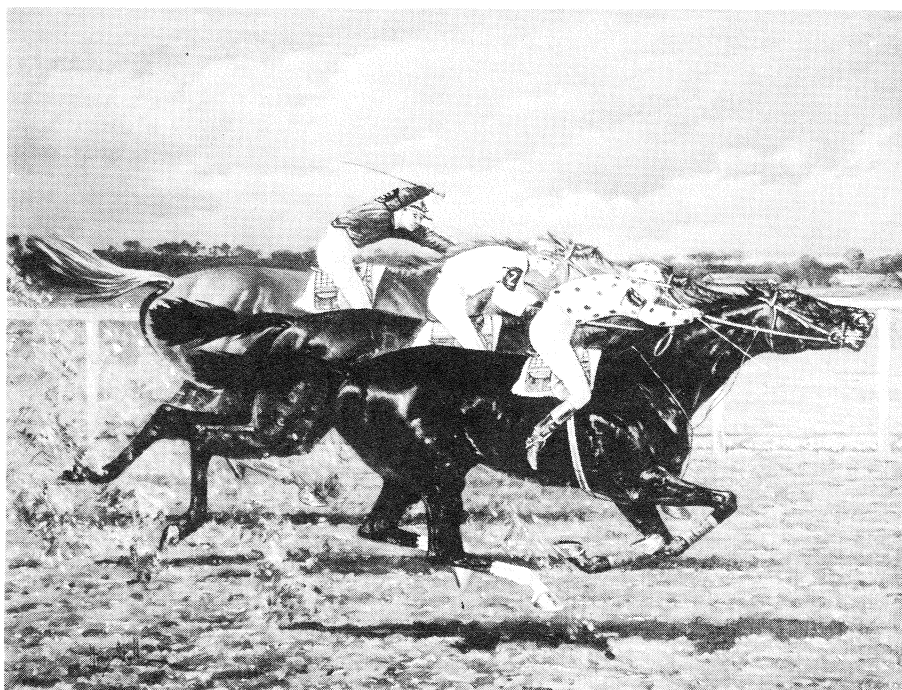
tury, prepared for *The Thoroughbred Record* in 1913, he wrote: "Within the past thirty years, Mr. Stull enjoyed a popularity possessed by no other American Specialist. It was a case of 'Eclipse first and the rest nowhere'."

Throughout his career, only two brief articles were ever prepared on Henry Stull. He was somewhat illusive and extremely itinerant, and it was difficult to

get him to set aside his humorous disposition and be serious.

A sad commentary that this man, a contributor to the American racing scene, is so personally unknown. Perhaps these brief reflections may present him to his admirers and answer some of their questions.

How did this son of a Canadian hack driver, born near a stable on August 25,



Domino Winning the Futurity, by Henry Stull c.1893. The Futurity was run at the Sheephead Bay Course over a distance of about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile in 1:12-4/5. The net value to the winner was \$48,910, ridden by Fred Taral and carrying 130 lbs., Domino was owned by James R. Keene.

Photograph courtesy of The National Museum of Racing.

1851, in Hamilton, Ontario, rise to such assuring acceptance, among the horsemen of the era, without one shred of evidence to substantiate any formal art training?

By furnishing them portraits of their beloved horses? True, but equally as important and quite overlooked, he also contributed his entertaining, warm and humorous personality. When gentlemen gathered on farm patios or hotel porches, following the daily races, he was a most welcomed participant in their midst.

Henry Stull became a horse artist by chance and not by choice. He was close to twenty five years of age before he ever drew a race horse. While his drawing ability had manifested itself at an early age, when he drew the habits of his father's livery, it was not his first love. That was the theatre and, while placed in abeyance during his career, was never dismissed from his thoughts.

This infatuation, discouraged by his parents, came to a head in his teens and he literally ran away to appear with a theatrical company that took him to Buffalo for an engagement. This experience was to prove a dismal failure, and he returned home more determined than ever to "m-

ake the stage." His father had other ideas for the young man, and offered him a choice of either joining him in the cab business or taking a position with an insurance firm in Toronto. He chose the latter.

In 1870, his decision was made to migrate to New York City and seek theatrical fame there but, once again, he failed to achieve expected success. Circumstances compelled him to seek other employment and, as in Toronto, he was soon ensconced on a high desk as a clerk for an insurance concern. What he thought was his less domineering talent revealed itself and was put to good use by his employers to depict the necessary requirements of their business, buildings, fires, ships, etc.

Here, you might say, Stull made a wise decision which was the turning point in his life. He began to sketch and gather a portfolio of every-day street scenes he observed on his travels throughout the city.

Frank Leslie, always open for new talent for his *Illustrated Weekly*, say promise in some of the material Stull had submitted and he was soon added to the staff. His "on the scene" assignments

were expanded into caricatures, lampoons and cartoons and these became regular features. The ones that Leslie's couldn't use were soon appearing in other publications, including *Harper's*. He continued a successful career in this field for many years; concurrently with the new one he was soon to enter. The theater was not completely disregarded and, in his spare moments, he accepted bit parts or painted scenery for an amateur theatrical company in Brooklyn.

Always fascinated by horses and becoming bored by his daily, routine assignments, he sought new outlets and began to attend the races at Jerome Park or the Sunday trotting meets. The participants of these events became his new subjects, but Leslie had little use for them and they were merely added to his ever-growing portfolio. August Belmont's Fiddlesticks was the winner of the 1876 renewal of the Withers at Jerome Park. Stull, present that day, sketched the horse on back of his programme card; transposing it to paper soon after. Co-tenanted in the same building as the *Weekly* was the *Sporting New Yorker*, which printed the sketch and a number of others he submitted. Mr. Belmont was immediately pleased upon seeing it and believed this promising young artist might contribute something missing and awaited on the track at the time. He brought it to the attention of Colonel Elisha Buck, editor of the *Spirit of the Times*, who was not totally unaware of Stull's potential and, upon the elder Belmont's insistence, he was encouraged to submit some of his sketches to the *Times*.

This was the beginning of a career which was to prove mutually advantages to himself and racing during a period when recording was necessary, and affords us visual recollections of so many horses of that era. The horse was king. His victories were celebrated in crystal ballrooms; the festivities of the evening culminating in the unveiling of the winner's portrait. Stull, familiar with and having experimented in oils earlier, appreciated this and quickly moved into the field.

During the remainder of his life, up until his death on March 18, 1913, he was to contribute an unbelievable quantity of oil paintings and sketches of racehorses

and trotters, and they are still being uncovered today.

Personally, Henry Stull was a bon vivant; appreciated by young and old alike and he played that character well. Since he could not become an actor, he made his world and surroundings a stage to overcome that frustration. Here, we have an understanding as to why he resided close by and sought out theatrical companions. He had a spiritual outlook on life, a keen memory, and his conversation held an audience. In a sense, he remained a thespian his entire life. His arrival was eagerly awaited on the farms. After plesantries and a few drinks, and he liked to imbibe, he was easily aroused and given the floor. Nothing rocked him more than breeding mistakes that made good. A questionable sired champion, and Ramapo was his favorite, would bring forth jibes teasing his hosts about not keeping their stallions separated. To keep a conversation going, he would innocently profess an ignorance of breeding, although he certainly was not uninformed of that phase of racing. His magazine articles, few and far between, showed a contradiction to this. He could well appraise the lineage tracings, more to the practical than theoretical side, to prove a point and often deferred to bring in a Leamington or Lexington or other forebearer of the horse he had just painted.

His many cartoons reflected an inherent wit. Not by captions alone, but in his method of placing possessive animals or objects around his subjects. He was a master at reflecting natinalistic origins in his characters' faces and, likely as not, carried through to their horses or dogs. Seldom was one without urchins up to prankish adventures and he could very well have been the model for their attentions. He never ignored them and both shared a mutual respect and admiration for one another.

Wanton cruelty to any animal was never tolerated in his persence. He could easily move into their natural domain and enjoy a good dog or cat fight and would certainly be there with his pencils. if he never painted a racehorse or trotter, his caricature of city horses, whether prancing coachers, emeshed carriage, tired delivery, wearied hacks, struggling sled,

charging fire or over-burdened drays, would have acclaimed him to their fanciers. He reflected a pathos in their acceptance of servitude; commenting with witticismon their destiny and he was not indisposed to share some of this in his racers.

His correspondence was spiced with humor. His personal letters were entertaining to the recipient and a source of enjoyment. In an era when the written page was the only means of exchanging ideas, humor and anecdotes, he well filled in many of these areas. Not only was his art and conversation appreciated, but his written conbributions also. Unfortunately, he could not be induced to prepare an autobiography. He steadfastly refused stating, "Too many confidences were reposed in him by his friends." They included the greats of the turf and, to them, he was intensely loyal.

His paintings may well be displayed in any trophy room, and have approached a revival, after so many dormant years, that is indeed interesting. One may almost ask why?

Without appreciating its significance, a young woman, admiring his

painting of Hanover in the National Museum of Racing at Saratoga, passed a cryptic remark about the canvas, "John, I believe that horse is looking right at us." For indeed he was, as Henry Stull not only depicted this natural curiosity in horses, but strived to achieve in his impressionisms their temperament traits, as well as certain peculiarities of confirmation so often passed over. He captured these facets and achieved a degree of realism that, upon closer inspection, make his animals live and place the viewer beside them at the very moment he took up his pallette.

Many critics are reluctant to accredit him a true horse artist, although acknowledging that he was a fine color illustrator and caricaturist. Perhaps this, without being offensive, is what he really intended. He saw beyond cold, hard anatomy something many fail to see; not just the ultimate results of selective breeding or perfect racing machines, but individual, living personalities. Granted, they were only animals.

Witness this uniqueness in the pinned ears of Elkwood, awaiting his detested jockey Fitzpatrick; the covering ex-



Stull painted the May 14, 1887, finish of the Brooklyn Handicap at the Gravesend Course of the Brooklyn Jockey Club in the realistic style as revealed by Muybridge's photographs of galloping horses. The unconventional presentation displeased a number of his patrons, resulting in a loss of commissions and for the next two years he refused to paint racing scenes.
Photograph courtesy of The National Museum of Racing.

pectancy of the stallion Rayon d'Or; the blinded Onondaga, rendered sightless because of his savagery; the gentle Nevada with her foal; the wary, watchful Salina; the exaggerated sway of Tenny's back or the arched neck of Alarm; Tammany, turning his head so all may see his "question mark" blaze; the racing excitement reflected in his post bound racers, or the well-accomplished pose of his many winners and the urgency and drive of his racers surging to the finish line in a cloud of dust. Seldom have these combinations infinitized to the degree they came together in Henry Stull and for these reasons his portrayals are distinct.

He fully realized his artistic failings and continually strived to overcome them. The over-all, repetitious line conformations and backgrounds convey a feeling of "ground-out tracings." Having achieved the climax of his delineations by using a magnifying glass, he then routinely filled in the remaining canvas with prefunctionary scenery; so duplicated, that the viewer can feel his impatience to display his work, but still stymied by the necessity of dabbing away.

However, he achieved the maximum results in his horses' coloring. Walter S. Vosburgh invariably stated, "Stull was the one man, of all horse painters, who has correctly given us the color of a bay horse." The same is true of his chestnuts. Whether livered, chocolate or golden, he produced a tonal quality which is sometimes overlooked. His blacks, and especially Domino, who appeared so to the eye, was of that peculiar color that, when the light was bright, showed him a chestnut and Stull appreciated these differences.

Certainly, having accomplished such representation in an animal, he could have produced better results in the riders he mounted on them. This was not always the case, as he gives the effect of trying to subvert the features of their faces. While they were depicted as white or colored and Jimmy McLaughlin's mustache was properly placed, those who have seen him or his portraits would have been hard pressed to recognize him. Yet knowing Isaac Murphy was a negro was the only way of ascertaining that masterful rider. But here, one gains further insight into his coloring perfection. From painting to

painting, wherever Murphy was mounted, the total quality remained constant. Comparisons with his other colored riders show a variance of tone.

His eye observed everything. He did not paint directly from life, but sketched everywhere and on anything. His overall appraisal of a horse, his conformation, breeding, markings and other characteristics were instilled in his memory and, then days afterwards, he completed his drawings and took up his brushes. His earlier oils, completed during the period 1876-88, lacked a "fine d' accomplishment" commensurate with his pencils. These were years of learning and experimentation for him but, one satisfied, his style stabilized. By 1890, he began to place more detail into the perfection of the entire painting.

His backgrounds attained a quality that bring forth admiration from many who are not particularly cognizant of his horses, but believe they overshadow the animal. He could have been an acceptable landscape artist, but that may have relegated him to a garrett. That fate, he would have rejected. Then again, the evident lack of vividness in his earlier backgrounds was not really a haphazard effort on his part to hasten completion of his work or were the results of influences gained when he painted theatrical scenery. They were hastily completed or repainted, with a threadbare application of paint, to set the mood of the play without distracting from the center of the stage. Stull felt for the horse, and he may have been subsciously projecting him forward as he would an actor and was painting from habit. He never lost his feeling for the scene, and would show a gathering, summer storm or his horses enveloped with rain if that was the weather. A quick referral to the day's charts verify that fact.

Any number of theories may be advanced for his gaining a peak. Stung by early dissenters, he absented himself for over a year to study anatomy at a veterinarians school. The requirements and pressures of continuing to furnish materials to the magazines and periodicals was withdrawn and, this release from a professional necessity, permitted more time to devote to his canvasses. He felt an interior motivation in painting exactly what he saw and he never believed he failed his

horses. He gave them credit for a true test of their ability and his numerous racing scenes show this total expansion of effort and stamina.

They reflect, when properly displayed, what many like to call a "Glow of Silver." Certainly a trademark, if not a form of trophy he felt the horse had earned besides the prizes, vases and cups and this was his way; his method of awarding unseen laurels to the honesty and integrity of racing thoroughbreds.

Stull, if alive today, would be most appreciative of the revival and interest in his material and, assuredly, would have sat back and awaited our acclaim, "Harry, you have done it again!"

Notes on F.M. Burlew

Frederick M. Burlew, son of Hall of Fame Trainer Fred Burlew, retired as Chief Horse Identifier for The New York Racing Association in 1983.

He has collected racing memorabilia and assembled racing color lists for close to sixty years, and has conducted extensive research into their origin.

About thirty years ago, seeking to verify certain racing color designs, he was introduced to Henry Stull's paintings. Curious as to why a biography of the artist was never written, and feeling a need to fill this void, he began a painstaking effort to learn all he could about Stull and to catalogue his works. After conducting hundreds of interviews, personally and by correspondence, he prepared a *Biographical Study on Stull* for The Keeneland Library at Lexington, KY. and recently presented a copy to the NSL. These "Reflections" are extracted from that study.



No one can really understand a nation without a knowledge of the way it spends its leisure time. By far the greater part of our leisure is devoted to sport, either as participants or as spectators. Our greatest spectator sport is horse racing which leads all other sports in paid admissions by a wide margin. Racing supports its own periodicals including daily newspapers, while the leisure time magazines with much the largest circulation are those devoted to shooting and fishing which, with foxhunting (and beagling), constitute the trio known as Field Sports.

Turf and Field Sports are the province of the National Sporting Library, reputedly the only public library in the country devoted solely to sport. Located in Middleburg, Virginia, forty miles west of Washington, it is housed in the 1804 brick house known as "Vine Hill" which it shares with the weekly periodical, "The Chronicle of the Horse." Although the comfortable main reading room is open to

anyone who wants to look up a pedigree or racing record, the National Sporting Library is, according to its masthead, "A Research Center for Turf and Field Sports, their History and Social Significance." No books are allowed to leave the building, the lower floor being reserved for the Librarian's office, for book stacks and for the underground humidity controlled, fireproof vault with shelves for approximately 6,000 volumes.

Since its founding in 1954, the National Sporting Library has received many gifts of entire collections and of individual volumes, some rare, some working copies, and hopes to receive many more in the future. It has, either in original issues or in microfilm, most of the North American periodicals devoted to Turf and Field Sports published during the past two centuries, and hopes to complete this collection within the next few years. It is now in the process of indexing these periodicals in accordance with standards

opportunities for original contributions to knowledge based on the very wide range of subjects covered by these periodicals - not only the full spectrum of field sports, but also other sports, art, literature, music and allied fields. We look forward to assisting many others in the future and hope that financial assistance, where required, may be made available to scholars undertaking particularly noteworthy projects through Fellowships and through publication.

The National Sporting Library collections, and particularly its microfilming and indexing project of periodicals devoted to Turf and Field Sports, a field hitherto relatively inaccessible to scholars, are becoming increasingly useful, not only for the pursuit of special projects, but also for putting into proper perspective the immense influence played by sport in the evolution of this country.

Alexander Mackay-Smith

Curator



The Library's underground fireproof vault, which has both temperature and humidity control. (Allen Photo)

Articles Solicited

The NSL is fortunate to have among its membership experts such as Mr. Burlew who generously agreed to share his research on the life and work of Henry Stull with the "Friends" and Newsletter readers.

We invite your participation if you have an area of interest which you will share with the "Friends". Send your typewritten, double-spaced manuscript for inclusion in an upcoming newsletter publication.

adopted by the American Society of Indexers. Already completed are indexes of The New York Sporting Magazine (Mar. 1833-Dec. 1834) and its successor, The United States Sporting Magazine (Nov. 1835-Aug. 1836), and the first five years of available issues of The Spirit of the Times (1831-1835). Nearing completion is the index of the American Turf Register, 1829-1844.

The considerable number of scholars who have already worked in the Library are enthusiastic about the availability of material, the facilities offered, and the

Adopt a Book

The NSL, along the lines of other non-profit institutions, is offering an opportunity to its members to become a donor of important additions to the library's collection. You may select from a list of recent purchases and reimburse the library for the cost of the book. Your name will then be placed on the bookplate as the donor of said book. Some of the historically important and current titles recently purchased and available for 'adoption' are: *The Minute Books of the Richmond Jockey Club 1824-1835* (very rare copy of the original owned by Maj. Thomas Doswell of Bullfield, Hanover County, Va.) \$300; *The Thoroughbred of New Jersey* (history) \$35; *Welsh Pony & Cob Society of America Stud Books* \$85; *Chester's Trotting and Racing Record Supplements 1886, 1887 and 1889* \$110; *40 Years With the Arapahoe Hunt* \$20; *The Lady is a Jock* \$8.50; *The Kid* (Steve Cauthen) \$12; *The Shoe* (Willie Shoemaker) \$30; *Desert Heritage/Artists' Collection of Blunt's Original Arab Horses* \$40; *Badminton Horse Trials* \$25; *Riders Across the Centuries/Horsemen of the Spanish Borderlands* \$40 and *Shetland Pony Stud Books* \$120.

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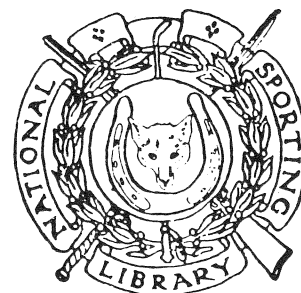
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